

To: karl.mathiesen.freelance@theguardian.com[karl.mathiesen.freelance@theguardian.com]
From: Hull, George
Sent: Mon 8/17/2015 5:48:18 PM
Subject: Questions on Gold King Mine

Mr. Mathiesen,

Please find below our response to your questions about the Gold King Mine spill.

George Hull

Office of Media Relations

U.S. EPA

INQUIRY: On the general state of tailings dams and mines. How many such storage facilities are there across the country? How does the EPA monitor the maintenance and condition of mines and dams that are holding contaminated water? Are abandoned mines, like Gold King, monitored?

It has been reported that the EPA has been trying to designate the area as a superfund area for some time. When was the idea first floated? Why was it unsuccessful? Does the EPA believe the spill would have occurred regardless of the lack of superfund designation? Would that have changed the way the clean up was undertaken (ie would there have been more money available and therefore less likelihood of a failure?)?

RESPONSE: EPA routinely monitors hardrock mine sites that are placed on the Superfund National Priorities List (NPL). However, EPA does not maintain records of the number of mines or tailings dams in the US. Tailings dam safety falls under the jurisdiction of State Dam Safety Agencies, and the Federal Land Management Agencies (e.g., Bureau of Land Management, Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service and the Forest Service) that have jurisdiction for monitoring the dams on federal lands. EPA does investigate or respond to incidents that are brought to our attention. In August 1994, the EPA report entitled "[Technical Report: Design and Evaluation of Tailings Dams](#)" noted that "EPA estimates that there may be several thousand tailings impoundments associated with active non-coal mining, and tens of thousands of inactive or abandoned impoundments."

The Gold King Mine site has never been proposed to be listed on the National Priority List (NPL). At this time we haven't received any requests from the governor to propose listing this site on the NPL, which we look for as part of the agency's policy and practice.

